

Simple Screenings Can Save Lives: OSF Saint Anthony's encourages colorectal cancer screenings

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ALTON - March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and while the month may be winding down, it is still important year round to make sure you and your family take advantage of life-saving colon cancer screenings.

Colorectal cancer forms in the colon or rectum and affects both men and women. It is the nation's second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S. when men and women are combined, however it is one of only a few cancers that can be prevented.

“Identifying and removing precancerous polyps or identifying and treating early colon cancers truly saves thousands of lives,” said Dr. Clifford Martin, Vice President, OSF Saint Anthony's Physician Group. “Nationally, based off a statistical analysis published in 2015 and quoted by the American Cancer Society, achieving an 80% screening rate by 2018 will lead to averting 277,000 colorectal cancer cases by 2030. This also translates into averting 203,000 colorectal cancer deaths by 2030 as well.”

Through a colonoscopy screening, doctors can find and remove hidden growths (called “polyps”) in the colon, before they become cancerous. Removing polyps can prevent cancer. Despite this, around one in three adults between 50 and 75 years old are not getting screened as recommended.

To help bridge that gap, OSF Saint Anthony's Health Center has signed a pledge to support a national colorectal cancer awareness campaign, called *80% by 2018*.

“*80% by 2018*” is a National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable initiative in which hundreds of organizations have committed to reducing colorectal cancer as a major public health problem. Organizations that join the pledge work toward the shared goal of 80% of adults aged 50 and older being regularly screened for colorectal cancer by 2018.

OSF Saint Anthony's physicians, Sisters and Mission Partners will make a commitment to work toward increasing the number of people screened for colorectal cancer.

“Educating and facilitating all of our patients who should be screened based on age and or risk factors is the right thing to do,” said Dr. Martin. “However, by joining the pledge we at Saint Anthony's not only acknowledge that we can improve our efforts of our existing patients, but also that we can participate with the many other healthcare entities in the Riverbend area to increase screening in our community. Madison, Jersey, Clinton, and St. Clair Counties all have screening rates below the Illinois and US averages.”

If you're over 50, you should get screened for colon cancer. Similarly, talk to your doctor about screening if you have a family history of the disease, even if you are under 50.

The simple screenings can be performed at your physician's office, or there are also easy at-home screening options you can ask about.

For more information or to make an appointment with a primary care provider, please call OSF Saint Anthony's Physician Group at (618) 462-2222.